

Sussex HOLLINGTON AND THE 1851 CENSUSES

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Family historians have long recognised the importance of the 1851 census to their research. It is of particular value because, despite its inadequacies, inconsistencies and omissions, it recorded marital status and the exact ages and places of birth of those enumerated and was the first to record the relationships of the residents at each property to its head of household. As such it enables connections between family members to be made that might otherwise prove very difficult or even impossible. But, how many family historians take the trouble to look beyond the individuals that they are researching and make a detailed study of all the returns for a parish? Such an analysis of the 1851 census for a parish, together with information from the Religious Census which was also held in that year, can reveal a great deal about the community in which people lived and, in particular, challenge some of the assumptions that are at times made about life in Victorian England. Certainly this is the case with the returns for the ancient parish of Hollington.

Hollington, which was recorded in the Domesday Survey, has today largely been absorbed into the built-up area of Hastings and St Leonards. However, as recently as 1949 the Rev Dr F W B Bullock in his scholarly work on the history of Hollington's Church in the Wood was able to state that although "the bulk of the population of Hollington is no longer agricultural ... by far the greater part of the area ... is still rural – farms, fields and woods".

Two hundred years ago the parish was still very much an isolated rural scattering of dwellings with a remote ancient church. The closest it came to having a proper village centre was in the area known as Hollington Corner at the junction of the old Church and Wishing Tree Roads where stood a forge, a public house and a number of cottages.

Hastings was, at this time, concentrated in the Old Town area and around the Priory Valley. Travellers to Hollington had to use a rural track which meandered along roughly the line of the present Bohemia Road until it reached the crest of the hill just north of the present Silverhill Junction and then dropped steeply through woods and fields until the first buildings in Hollington Old Lane were reached.

When James BURTON began to build his new town of St Leonards-on-Sea in 1828 the main road to London from Hastings passed out of the eastern side of the town and along The Ridge to the north and out through Battle and Robertsbridge. BURTON favoured a more direct route from St Leonards to London, from which

most of his residents and visitors came, and applied to Parliament for a Turnpike Act to allow him to build a new road to London which would pass through the eastern part of the parish of Hollington and out through Whatlington.

This proposal alarmed many of the business people of Battle and Hastings alike who, fearing that they would suffer if the old Hastings to London road became redundant, proposed a more direct route from Hastings itself, which was by now already expanding westwards. This would cut through the middle of Hollington as it eventually joined the old road before it reached Battle.

These two roads, which were opened in the 1830s, were among the last turnpike roads in the country to be constructed and ended the relative isolation of the parish. Hollington soon began to develop a village centre along the new Battle road. By 1851 not only was long-distance traffic passing through the village but improved communications with Hastings and St Leonards had allowed the development of market gardens and dairy farms to supply the rapidly expanding population of these towns. Although this had resulted in bringing more jobs and people to Hollington these improved communications were, in the longer term, to contribute towards Hastings spreading out until its boundaries swallowed up the village.

The 1851 census indicated that there were 579 people living in Hollington in 98 households (an average of 5.9 persons per household). Not surprisingly, the average age was much lower than would be expected today, with only about 19% of people aged over 40. However, the returns do indicate that it was still possible for ordinary people to live to a decent age in Victorian England. An admittedly small number of eight were recorded as 70 years of age or more, with two well into their eighties.

Perhaps of more interest is the record of where individuals were born. The notion that most people lived in the parish in which they were born is certainly not supported by the returns for Hollington. In fact, there is evidence of considerable geographical mobility. It is true that it is not easy to be absolutely accurate in this matter. Some individuals professed not to know where they were born, possibly genuinely in a number of cases, and others may well have lied. The fear that the information might be used to send people back to their home parishes, as the Poor Law directed, was never far away in 1851. Yet only 182 (32%) were shown as being born in Hollington. A further 169 (29%) were born in nearby parishes which broadly made up the eastern half of East Sussex. The remaining 228 (39%), apart from a relatively small number who did not declare their origin, came from further afield, including Warwickshire, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Dorset, Wiltshire, Wales, Scotland and even Normandy and Switzerland. Surprisingly, only 10 of the 98 heads of household appear to have been born in Hollington itself.

Another interesting aspect of the returns relates to the occupations that were recorded. As would be expected, the most common occupation amongst the 248 noted in this rural parish was that of agricultural labourer. Yet there were only 84 of these. Even if the five listed as farmers and the seven other assorted farm workers are counted, only about 39% worked directly on the land. Although some 29

individuals (12%) could be classed as domestic servants, by far the largest group of the non-agricultural workers was that of railway labourers (i.e. mostly navvies). Many of these 81 (33%) were unmarried and itinerant workers. Their presence underlines the importance of not automatically making assumptions about the profile of workers in rural parishes. The London, Brighton and South Coast Railway had opened its line to Bulverhythe in 1846 and the South Eastern Railway line from Ashford through to Hastings and Gensing (later Warrior Square) stations had been opened in February 1851. Many of the railway workers who had camped in Hollington would undoubtedly have worked on these lines including, during the year before the census, on both the Hastings and St Leonards tunnels. By the time the 1851 census was taken on 30 March they would presumably have been involved with the construction of the South Eastern Railway's more direct route to London from Hastings which was opened in February 1852. Where no better accommodation was available these navvies built huts in fields. Thus, for example, the census returns record 'a navvy encampment on the line north of Harley Shute'.

A further consequence of the presence of these railway workers was that it created an uneven balance between males (56%) and females (44%) in the parish and this brought into question, as far as Hollington was concerned, the widely held belief that it was more difficult for a farm worker to get a cottage than a girl in the 19th century. The 1851 returns reveal that, of the agricultural workers who were heads of households, one was unmarried, three were widowed and the rest married. So only one seems to have got a cottage without a girl. On the other hand, of the agricultural workers who were not heads of households, although five were widowed, none were married. This is perhaps not very surprising when we consider that there were 101 males who were either unmarried or widowed in the parish and only 30 females, including several old ladies!

The presence of so many railway navvies also helped bring into question the often held assumption that most people attended church in Victorian rural parishes. There were two places of worship in Hollington in 1851 – the isolated ancient parish Church-in-the-Wood and the Wesleyan Methodist chapel which had been opened on the site of the present chapel adjacent to the new Battle Road in 1838. The 1851 Religious Census records that the church was attended by 100 in the morning and 43 in the afternoon, while the chapel had 56 worshippers in the afternoon and 58 in the evening. If individuals only attended church once on a Sunday this would still only account for less than 45% of the population. It is far more likely that most of those who attended services did so twice. This would have meant that there might have been no more than 30% of the parish who regularly attended church.

In conclusion, then, an analysis of the returns of both censuses for a parish such as Hollington can provide a great deal more than the immediate family information that is initially sought. They can not only give an insight into the life of the whole community but also reveal much interesting, unexpected and even surprising detail.

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Methodism And The 1851 Religious Census

..... David Lambourne

Thomas MITCHELL seems to have been the first of John WESLEY's itinerant preachers to have visited Sussex. When he came to Rye in 1756, he formed a small Wesleyan society, and WESLEY himself, after presumably hearing favourable reports, made the first of his 14 recorded visits to the county two years later. During this first visit he preached several times in Rye and elsewhere in the immediate area, including at Dr. Stonestreet's home at Perryman's at Northiam.

During WESLEY's lifetime other societies were formed including at Northiam, Peasmarsh, Robertsbridge, Ewhurst and Winchelsea. At Ewhurst, the curate at the parish church was converted, went on to become a prominent Methodist and was even the officiating minister at WESLEY's funeral in 1791. To begin with congregations met in the open air and then in places which were licenced for worship. The latter were most usually private dwelling houses but could be other buildings such as barns or warehouses. After a while, the Rye society found a home within an old Presbyterian chapel in Mermaid Street before having its own chapel built near the Ypres Tower. This building, which was opened by WESLEY himself in 1789, was demolished in 1814 to make way for a larger building on the same site.

At Winchelsea a chapel was opened in 1785 and John WESLEY preached there on his visit to Rye in 1789. This building, which is still used for occasional services and is largely unaltered, remains and is believed to be the only surviving Wesleyan chapel in Sussex in which the founder of the movement preached. Incidentally, WESLEY preached his last outdoor sermon at Winchelsea in 1790 under a tree outside the parish churchyard just a few months before his death.

By the 1820s and 1830s there were many Methodist congregations in Sussex, predominantly in the eastern part of East Sussex. Not all of these survived for long, but by the middle of the 19th Century a more settled picture emerges. Fortunately, a census of religious places of worship was taken in 1851, the only one of its kind, and this provides us with a snapshot of the state of Methodism in the county.

When the decennial population census for 1851 was being planned, one in which it was intended to include more detailed information than its predecessors, the authorities originally proposed to incorporate questions on religious affiliation on the form to be completed by each householder. Apart from the widespread disquiet that was felt about Government interference in ordinary lives, however, there was strong opposition from the established Church which seems to have felt

particularly threatened by the proposal. So it was eventually decided to organise a separate Census of Religious Worship which would be concerned merely with places of worship and congregations. It would be held alongside the main decennial census and use the same local registrars and enumerators. There was a proposal to repeat the exercise in 1861 but it came to nothing, so the 1851 survey remains a unique resource for historians and sociologists interested in religious practice.

The census required that a form had to be completed for each congregation. Methodists and other non-conformists had a slightly different form to complete than Anglicans. They were required to record:

- The 'date of erection' of the place of worship, whether it was 'a separate and entire building' and whether it was 'used exclusively as a place of worship'
- The 'accommodation available for worshippers' separated into a) 'free sittings' and b) 'other sittings' together with 'free space or standing room'
- The 'numbers attending each service' and 'Sunday scholars'. There was a provision on the form for average attendances as an alternative to the actual attendances on census Sunday being 30 March 1851.

The forms had to be signed and the signatory's official position and postal address recorded.

In this article only the societies in the Rye, Hastings and Battle Registration Districts are being considered. In this area the returns show that there were by 1851 twenty-five Methodist congregations, twenty-three of which were part of the main Wesleyan group and the remaining two, those at Guestling and Pett, Bible Christian. The Bible Christian Movement had begun in the West Country under the leadership of William O'BRYAN. The Wesleyan O'BRYAN had started as an independent itinerant preacher but had been expelled in 1810 by the Cornwall Wesleyan District Meeting which did not accept his itinerancy. Following his reinstatement and further expulsion in 1814 he continued his work and the Bible Christian Movement rapidly expanded to other parts of the country. The Bible Christians remained strictly Methodist in both their theology and style of organisation. Right from the beginning, though, they had women preachers and they also embraced the temperance movement before other Methodist groups. They were eventually fully united with other Methodists during the 20th Century.

There were many concerns about the accuracy of the completed census returns. There are suspicions that some numbers, particularly Anglican, were exaggerated. Whilst some returns appear to have been completed with diligence, the figures on others, such as the Bible Christian congregation at Guestling where a figure of 30 or 40 was provided for the one evening service, are clearly estimates. Occasionally two returns were submitted for one congregation and these did not always agree. For example, there were two returns for the Ninfield Wesleyan Chapel in the neighbouring district of Hailsham. The first was submitted by the Sunday School Superintendent who provided an estimated figure for average adult attendance of

70 for each of the afternoon and evening services and the other by the Superintendent Minister of the Hastings Circuit who claimed that there was an average of 80 in the afternoon and 110 in the evening!

Problems of interpretation also quickly became evident. Some returns provided separate returns for Sunday scholars while others seem simply to have included these in the figures for the general congregation. Others have questioned, too, whether attendances for Census Sunday could be taken as typical as it was raining on that day. Perhaps a greater problem, though, is that no account was taken of the number of worshippers who attended more than one service during the day. Various attempts to deal with this issue were made. For example, Horace MANN, whose task it was to analyse the statistics, came up with the following rather crude formula: morning attendance plus half the afternoon attendance plus one third of the evening attendance equals the total number of individual worshippers. Some congregations, of course, did not have a morning service or indeed more than one service on a Sunday. It is quite possible that Methodists and other non-conformists were more likely than Anglicans to attend more than one service. The truth is, though, that ultimately we simply do not know.

Although the Census tells us very little about religious belief or conviction, and despite its flaws and shortcomings, it does, provide a rich resource for those interested in religious observance in the mid-19th Century. For instance, a statistical analysis for the whole of England shows that the proportion of attendances at Anglican places of worship was much higher in Sussex than in the country as a whole and higher even than in the neighbouring counties of Kent and Hampshire. On the other hand, the corresponding figures for Protestant dissenters, including Methodists, was proportionately lower in Sussex than in England as a whole and lower than in both Kent and Hampshire. Yet, as the returns demonstrate, Methodists had a significant presence in the most easterly Sussex Registration Districts of Rye, Hastings and Battle. By comparison, the returns show that Methodists made a much smaller impact by 1851 in the three most westerly Sussex districts of Chichester, Midhurst and Westbourne where there was a total of just 6 societies; 2 Wesleyan, 3 Bible Christian and one Independent Methodist.

In 1851 not all of the twenty-five Methodist congregations had their own separate chapel buildings. The returns indicate that those at Guestling, Bohemia Terrace, Catsfield, Ewhurst and Netherfield were still meeting elsewhere such as in private dwelling houses. The chapel recorded at Pett is the only building still in regular use by a Methodist society. Methodists do not seem to have been too attached to particular buildings and have instead had a history of adapting to their changing circumstances. For example, the society at Hollington began meeting in John STARR's cottage in Old Church Road in 1822/3, then moved to a small chapel in 1825, after which it built a new chapel on Battle Road in 1838 only for this to be found too small and replaced by a larger building on the same site in 1887.

The following simplified table includes the numbers attending in each service and includes Sunday scholars with the adult numbers. The figures clearly reveal the significant strength of Methodism in the most easterly part of the county.

Society	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Rye	326	50	300
Iden	---	60	70
Peasmarsh	---	160	150
Beckley	185	---	167
Northiam	---	105	170
Broad Oak	---	111	118
Winchelsea	30	50	60
Camber	40	60	16
Icklesham	---	25	64
Pett	---	67	70
Guestling	---	---	30 or 40
Fairlight Down	---	97	75
Bourne Street, Hastings	432	90	450
Norman Road, St. Leonards-on-Sea	326	210	280
Bohemia Terrace, St. Leonards-on-Sea	---	---	50
Hollington	---	56	58
Bexhill	70	145	150
Little Common	---	---	35
Pevensey Sluice	---	20	---
Catsfield	15	---	30
Sedlescombe	137	---	97
Ewhurst	50	---	60
Staplecross	72	155	117
Battle	90	224	74
Netherfield	---	30	---

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WARTIME AND HOLLINGTON CHAPEL

2019 marks the 80th anniversary of the 2nd World War, and as we approach, once again, the season of Remembrance, David Lambourne reflects on what war meant to the people of Hollington and to the work and witness of Hollington Methodist Chapel.

The 1914-18 war was supposed to have been 'the war to end all wars.' Yet a generation later, eighty years ago this year, European powers found themselves embroiled in another murderous conflict. This conflict was not just fought on distant shores but also had a massive impact on the 'home front' including the Hastings area and the rest of the south coast. The congregation at the Hollington chapel took pride, however, in the

fact that it was able to remain open for business throughout the war while so many other places of worship in the area were forced by circumstances to either close or partially close. The chapel at St. Helens, for example, closed soon after the outbreak of hostilities. The pews were removed, and the building used as a youth club. It was not until October 1948 that it was to re-open as a place of worship.



It is not that the Hollington area got off particularly lightly. One bomb went through the back of the police house in Battle Road and another, a heavy 1000kg bomb, landed in Ashbrook Road but fortunately failed to explode. Later in the conflict, doodlebugs became a menace and fell in the area, including one which badly damaged a house in Old Church Road near the chapel one Sunday causing fatalities. Pastor Edwards cancelled the evening service that day and he and others helped with digging through the debris. My father recalled that he and his father used simply to dive to the ground when working in the fields when the doodlebugs passed over. One resident recalled that her father had been killed in a bomb attack and then the family had been machine gunned from a single German plane while standing round his graveside during his burial at Hollington Church in the Wood. I also know of two Hollington men, one a member of the congregation and the other a former work colleague, who had both been captured by the Germans and put in prisoner of war camps. Their wives had been informed that they 'were missing presumed

dead'. On their release after hostilities ended, they both returned home only to find that their wives had taken up with other men. One had even had children with her new husband. What a homecoming!

The Methodist chapel itself was under the care of Pastor Hughes at the outbreak of war and then of Pastor Kerry and, until the end of hostilities, of Pastor Edwards. It was Pastor Hughes that conducted the wedding ceremony of my parents, William Lambourne and Miriam Smith in 1941, who some of you will still remember. Their wartime



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reception was a very low-key affair in a back garden. Not that it would ever have been an elaborate event. They were Methodists after all!

At the outbreak of war evacuees were actually sent to the Hollington area, but, in 1940, when the Sunday School children were enjoying their annual treat at my grandparents' home at Ashdown Farm, a message was received that not only were these evacuees to be removed to a safer area but Hollington children were to be evacuated as well.

Many of the young men and women who had been members of the Boys' and Girls' Brigades had joined the forces or been called to engage in other war work. On the first Sunday evening service each month in the chapel a list of more than fifty names was

read out of those serving in various capacities. Yet despite the fact that numbers were greatly depleted and despite damage to the chapel from a nearby explosion, regular services and meetings for both Brigades continued to be held.

We do have to continue to remember and give thanks for the fortitude and the sacrifice of so many both in this and other conflicts.

That is why Remembrance Day must remain of great importance. Fortunately, the countries of Western Europe have learned, at least for now, to live together (despite Brexit). My own grandchildren are half German, something which would have proved very challenging for their parents eighty years ago.

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